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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to discover if five stereotypes about teachers who attend conferences would hold true. The stereotypes are: (1) more elementary than secondary school teachers attend conferences, (2) professional conference goers tend to be experienced teachers, (3) more women than men attend conferences, (4) teachers want specific ideas that they can use in their classrooms, and (5) teachers are not interested in articulation and prefer sessions that focus on specific grade levels. Fifty-seven of the 328 teacher-participants at a one-day, university sponsored conference on the teaching of written composition were asked to log their time and to evaluate each session they attended. The teachers were able to choose from 20 workshops, five demonstrations, and three talks. Sessions were provided for all grades, kindergarten through university level. Analysis of the teachers' responses supported the first four stereotypes: the teachers tended to be experienced, to teach in the lower grades, to be female, and to be interested more in specific teaching ideas than in general discussions. The responses also partially supported the fifth stereotype. (FL)

What Teachers Do at Conferences: Stereotypes and Some Tentative Questions

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With new developments in curriculum and instruction simultaneous to an apparently declining job market for beginning teachers, school districts and departments of education are turning increasingly to inservice education of existing staff. In fact, staff development has become a big business. For instance, a recent directory released by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development lists 225 current staff development projects--in California alone (1979). Concurrently, researchers have turned their attention to what types of teachers benefit from staff development projects and under what conditions. Rand studies (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977), based on an examination of several hundred federally funded staff development projects, show that very little effective change in teacher attitude and performance resulted. One conclusion from the studies was that teachers of more than five years' experience appear to be resistant to change and that if staff development is to take place, program directors had better focus on less experienced teachers. Bruce Joyce (1977), on the other hand, found that more experienced teachers tended to thrive in staff development projects, much more so than less experienced teachers. This conclusion was supported by a study of 24 composition teachers enrolled in a summer teaching seminar (Donlan, in press).

Staff development may take several forms, including school-site training sessions and summer workshops. However, one of the most popular forms of staff development is voluntary attendance at one-day or weekend professional conferences. Conferences tend to draw a different type of teacher in comparison to other forms of staff development, principally because teachers generally have to pay their own conference fees and attend on their own time. Occasionally, conferences offer college or university credit, which enables some teachers to advance on a salary scale.

Conferences tend to offer alternative program sessions for teachers. For instance, at a given conference, teachers can hear inspiring speakers, attend "how to do it" workshop sessions, or share ideas with colleagues in a round-table atmosphere. Also, teachers may attend sessions aimed at their own grade levels or attend sessions aimed at different grade levels. With abundant options, teachers make conscious choices that reflect their values and attitudes. Knowing how and why teachers make choices will help program planners to develop future conferences and to gain insight into how teachers chose to educate themselves.

Beginning with Stereotypes

Stereotypes about teachers tend to dominate the thoughts of staff developers as they plan conferences. Here are a few of these stereotypes:

1. If you want good attendance, include sessions that will draw elementary teachers. MORE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ATTEND CONFERENCES THAN DO SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

2. Make the sessions worthwhile for experienced teachers. PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE GOERS TENO TO BE EXPERIENCED TEACHERS.

3. Try to plan some sessions that will appeal to men. THERE ARE FAR FEWER MEN WILLING TO COME TO CONFERENCES THAN WOMEN.

4. Make the sessions practical with lots of handouts. TEACHERS WANT SPECIFIC IDEAS FOR MONOAY MORNING.

5. Plan sessions that focus on specific grade levels. TEACHERS ARE NOT INTERESTEO IN ARTICULATION.

The University sponsors each year a conference on the teaching of written composition. Teachers of writing, kindergarten through university, are encouraged to attend a one-day conference for a small fee, lunch included. After four years of giving this annual conference, University program planners became interested in how the teachers planned their conference time--specifically, what sessions they chose, whether they found them valuable, and why. In effect, would the five stereotypes be supported?

The Conference Organization

The conference was a seven-hour program, running from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. There were two general sessions where all conference attendees were present, a forty-five-minute opening session (8:00 - 8:45 a.m.) and a luncheon banquet/major speaker session (12:00 - 3:00 p.m.). Between 9:00 and 12:00 teachers could attend a variety of half-hour and hour sessions. First, the conference offered workshops taught by local teachers that tended to offer practical teaching suggestions and sample lesson plans. Second, teachers could attend demonstration classrooms, where they could observe an experienced teacher presenting an hour or half-hour, theory-based lesson to a group of 40 students. Third, teachers could attend "author sessions," where prominent writers of children's and adolescent literature talked with children and teachers about the theoretical process of writing. The program was

arranged so that each teacher could make program choices each half-hour or hour. Teachers were encouraged to "mix or match" across grade levels:

	Grade Level Workshops				Demonstration	Author
9	K-6	7-8	9-12	College	9-12 students	K-6 students
9:30	K-6	7-8	9-12			
10	K-6	7-8	9-12	College	K-6 students	7-8 students
10:30	K-6	7-8	9-12		K-6 students	
11	K-6	7-8	9-12	College	7-8 students	9-12 students
11:30	K-6	7-8	9-12		7-8 students	

In effect, teachers could assemble a three-hour program, selecting from among 20 workshops, five demonstrations, and three author talks. By examining how teachers planned their time, investigators might gain some insight into program planning and perhaps generate a few hypotheses.

The Sample: Stereotypes 1, 2, and 3 Upheld

Attending the Conference were 378 people, including program presenters, attending teachers, students, and parents. Since it would be difficult to monitor each attendee, investigators sampled 57 teachers who had signed up for University credit, since these teachers were asked to log their time and evaluate each session they attended. Consequently, the sample may not be representative of the total attendance. On the other hand, these 57 teachers were purposive in their attendance; they wanted salary credit.

As a group, the 57 teachers represented a range of teaching experience from no years (student teachers) to 38 years, with a median of seven years. Slightly over half the group were primary school teachers.

As expected, no college or university instructor signed up for course credit. Table 1 presents in more complete form the data on the sample of 57 teachers.

Table 1. Data on the sample of conference attendees who signed up for University credit.

Grade Level	N	Mean years of experience	SD years of experience	N males	N females
K-3	29	9.2	8.570	2	27
4-6	7	7.7	7.250	2	5
K-6	3	13.3	6.350	1	2
7-8	11	9.1	5.088	1	10
9-12	7	9.5	12.177	2	5
Coll.	0	0.0	0.000	0	0
Total	57	9.1	7.994	8	49

As Table 1 suggests, the teachers in the sample tended (1) to teach in the lower grades, (2) to be experienced (only teachers had five or fewer years' experience), and (3) to be female.

Logging Time Spent at the Conference

The 57 teachers were asked to log their time spent during the three-hour period from 9a.m. to noon. Teachers were asked to make six entries, one for each half-hour. The entry was to include a description of each session attended. Although some teachers attended hour-long sessions (a double entry), several left these sessions mid-way to attend a half-hour session.

Investigators developed a code to describe each teacher's attendance pattern. What follows is a description of the code:

Code	Session Type
1	workshop
2	demonstration
3	author talk
4	extenuating circumstance e.g. "gave a session" or attended "invitational seminar"
5	attended nothing

Each teacher's schedule could be coded with six numbers, depending upon what they were doing each of 6 half-hours. Consider this sample teacher's schedule:

Schedule		Code
9	workshop	1
9:30	workshop	1
10	demonstration	2
10:30	workshop	1
11:00	author talk	3
11:30	author talk	3

or 112133

After each teacher was assigned a six-number code, investigators looked at the session combinations the teachers patterned. As shown in Table 2, eight patterns emerged.

Table 2. Frequency distribution, by grade level, of Conference attendance patterns

Pattern	Code	N	Percentage of Total
1. all workshops	1	11	19 %
2. work/demonstration	1,2	28	49 %
3. work/extenuating	1,4	1	2 %
4. work/nothing	1,5	3	5 %
5. work/demonstration/author	1,2,3	6	10 %
6. work/demonstration/nothing	1,2,5	4	7 %
7. demonstration/author/nothing	2,3,5	2	3 %
8. all extenuating	4	2	3 %
		57	

Selection of the Most Valuable Session: Stereotype 4 Upheld

After logging their time, teachers were asked to list and describe what had been "the most valuable session" they had attended that morning. In addition, they were asked to give two or three reasons why they felt it was "the most valuable."

Investigators were interested in the responses of those teachers who had planned programs containing more than one session type. This analysis eliminated 17 teachers: 11 (all workshops), 1 (work/extenuating), 3 (work/nothing), 2 (all extenuating). Table 3 indicates the frequency by session type of what teachers perceived as the most valuable session:

Table 3. Frequency distribution by session type of what teachers perceived as the most valuable session

Code	Attendance Pattern	N	Most Valuable Work	Demo	Author	No choice
1,2	work/demo	28	20	6	0	2
1,2,3	work/demo/auth	6	1	3	1	1
1,2,5	work/demo/noth	4	3	1	0	0
2,3,5	demo/auth/noth	2	0	0	2	3
	Total	40	24	10	3	3

Some generalizations might be tentatively drawn on the basis of data from Table 3. If teachers attended both workshops and demonstrations, they tended to find the workshops more valuable. If they attended workshops, demonstrations, and author sessions, they tended to find the demonstrations more valuable. If they attended demonstrations and author sessions, they tended to find the author sessions more valuable. In general, though, teachers, overall, perceived the workshops as being most valuable.

When asked why they felt these sessions were most valuable, teachers came up with a variety of reasons. Investigators logged only the first reason, believing that the first reason listed would be the most important. The reasons tended to cluster around eight categories:

Categories	Code	Description
1. Usefulness	U	This session was practical; I could use the ideas; it applied to my specific teaching situation.
2. Entertaining	E	This session was enjoyable and fun. It was lively.
3. Informational	N	This session gave me a lot of new ideas. I learned a lot by going to this session. It presented new information.
4. Inspirational	I	This session turned me on. The speaker stimulated me. What a dedicated human being the speaker is!
5. Theoretical	T	This session presented educational theory well. It was conceptually well developed, well grounded in research.
6. Organized	O	This session was organized well. Ideas clearly presented. Good use of limited time.
7. Agreement	A	This session fits perfectly what I believe to be true. I agree with the presenter (but I don't necessarily want to use the ideas).
8. No response	Z	No comment.

Table 4 presents a frequency distribution of why teachers felt their sessions were most valuable:

Table 4. Frequency distribution of reasons for selecting most valuable session, by category

Category	Frequency	Percentage of Total
U	23	40 %
E	6	11 %
N	13	23 %
I	6	11 %
T	4	7 %
o	3	5 %
A	1	2 %
Z	1	2 %
	57	

By examining the data in Table 4, one can see how teachers tend to define implicitly the term valuable. The largest number of teachers define value as practicality and immediate usability. Smaller numbers of teachers define value as inspiration, sound theory, and new knowledge.

Articulation: Stereotype 5 Partially Upheld

Investigators then wanted to determine whether teachers chose to attend sessions that were not particularly focused at their respective grade levels. For instance, would an elementary school teacher attend sessions focusing on junior high or high school instruction? Investigators reviewed the logs of the 57 teachers to determine whether they attended sessions directed at other grade levels. Table 5 presents that data.

Table 5. Number of Teachers attending sessions directed at other grade levels

Grade Level	Σ Teachers in Group	N Attending Other Levels	N/Σ
K-3	28	3	.10
4-6	7	2	.28
K-6	3	0	.00
7-8	11	7	.69
9-12	7	4	.57

As the data in Table 5 suggest, there is a greater tendency for secondary teachers to attend sessions directed at a different grade level. However, it should be noted that these teachers seldom attended an elementary section; junior high teachers attended high school sessions, and senior high teachers attended junior high sessions.

Conclusions About Stereotypes

Although the analysis of data from the 57 evaluation forms is by no means conclusive, the information does pose questions for staff developers to ponder:

1. (Why) Do elementary teachers participate more readily in staff development projects than do secondary teachers?
2. (Why) Do experienced teachers participate more readily in staff development projects than do inexperienced teachers?
3. (Why) Are women at all levels of teaching more concerned about professional growth than are men?
4. If given the choice, (why) do teachers prefer to attend shorter "how to do it" sessions rather than sessions that deal with theory and conceptualization?
5. (Why) do teachers refrain from learning about teaching practices in grade levels other than their own?

Certainly, the answers to these questions cannot be found in this study, nor for that matter any single study. However, the questions are nonetheless vital, in that they underlie the success or failure of any staff development project. In effect, teacher growth is an issue of values.

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